

THE STAMP DISTRIBUTION SYNDICATE LTD

AND THE STAMP DISTRIBUTION (PARENTS COMPANY LTD

Rosemary Smith

In the last six months I have given my perfin display to two Yorkshire Philatelic Societies. On both occasions it was obvious, by questions that were asked, that the story of the 'first booklet stamps' was not widely known. Collectors of perfins are aware that the perfin dies 'SDS' and 'SDC' on the 1d lilac are scarce and fetch about £10 at auction: but how many are conversant with their history?

Recently Ken Dee sent me an article by Stan Hills, pulled from Gibbons "The Stamp Magazine" for November 1969 with details of The Stamp Distribution Company Ltd., the successor of The Stamp Distribution Syndicate Ltd. **This article was Part 3 and I assume Part 2 was about The Stamp Distribution Syndicate. If any member has a copy of this article by Stan L. Hills I would be very pleased to receive a copy.** This reminded me that I had intended to recount the history of these two companies.

Looking at my Cumulative Bulletin Index I found that the only reference to these two companies was in 1963 in Bulletins 43 & 44 and in 1964 Bulletin 62 (plus a very recent reference in "Seen In Auction" where one of the booklets came up for sale.) I did toy with the idea of giving a precis of the facts that are in various articles collected over the years, but as it seems to be a little known facet of perfin collecting, and philately in general, I will copy quite a number of articles almost in their entirety, trying to put them in chronological order.

The first is from **THE PHILATELIC BULLETIN Vol. 8 Oct 1970** by **Stan Hills**.

The First GB Postage Stamp Books

Recent research into Post Office Records has established that the first GB Postage Stamp Books were on sale to the public in May 1891. As these were obtainable through an automatic vending machine it can be claimed that these were also the first stamp machines as it was 'an offence to purchase postage stamps from any other source, other than from Post Offices', which were open from 8 am till 8 pm.

Mr W.Maysmor Williams wrote to the Postmaster-General, The Rt. Hon. H.C.Raikes, MP, requesting an interview to discuss the project, early in August 1889. As a result, the PMG granted permission to affix six Collins Automatic Stamp Deliverer Machines, experimentally, in London. The machines were to be placed Within Six Months or the permission would lapse.

The patentee (Collins) made application for the registration of a trade-mark with the slogan FROM PILLAR TO POST. The PMG raised an objection on the grounds that the slogan '. . had been in common use since the earliest days of racing, and therefore might be misconstrued by the general public'. The objection was upheld and in consequence of these protracted deliberations the machines were not affixed within the time limit imposed and the concession to Messrs Collins lapsed.

However, on 3 November 1890, permission was revived in favour of Mr Maysmor Williams, who exercised his concession through a company formed on 12th February 1891 with a nominal capital of £20,000 with the '. . .object of issuing stamp booklets through vending machines'. The company was registered under the title of The Stamp Distribution Syndicate Ltd with offices at 11 Queen Victoria Street, London EC. The location for the machines was increased from Six to Ten.

The second is the one from our own Bulletin back in 1963.

THE MOTHER OF ALL BOOKLETS

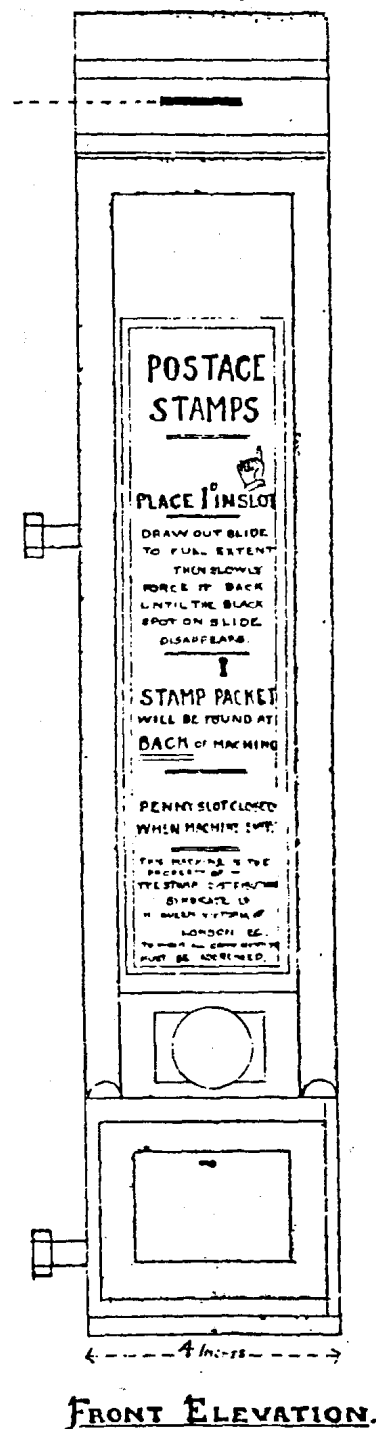
Extract from 'Gibbons Stamp Monthly' January 1952

Illustration from Post Office Archives

Our publishers purchased some months ago a small red booklet contained in an envelope, the back cover of the booklet having a slot into which was inserted a Penny lilac Queen Victoria stamp of Great Britain with the initials "SDC" perforated through it. We made enquiries about this booklet but could find out very little about it except that a well-known collector of Great Britain stamps was believed to have one and to regard it as being a very scarce item.

Reading through Gibbons' Monthly Journal of May 1891 we came across a paragraph which explained how this booklet came into existence.

AUTOMATIC POSTAGE STAMP DELIVERY. The authorities of the General Post Office having sanctioned, as a trial, the addition of an automatic postage stamp delivery box to their pillar-posts in Bedford and Cavendish Squares, the Houses of Parliament, Grosvenor Hotel, Kensington, Stroud green and Hornsey, invitations were given yesterday by The Stamp Distribution Syndicate for an inspection of two pillar-posts so fitted at the Post Office buildings at Mount-pleasant, in Farringdon Road.



Colonel Brodhurst, Mr Jeffrey Herbert -and Mr Arthur Hollinshead, directors, attended to receive visitors. The automatic boxes were about eighteen inches long by six broad and four deep, thus only extending about an inch beyond the top overhead of the posts to which they are attached, on the side most protected from street traffic. A great deal of attention has been bestowed upon their construction and they will reject both lead and iron discs - delivering only to a legitimate penny. The stamp is placed in a notch cut diagonally in the cover of a handy little memorandum book, which contains advertisements on every other page, the rest being left blank for notes, except three or four, on which are given postal instructions and other useful information. Each of these little books is put in a corresponding envelope, in which three holes are punched to show the stamp. The delivery is neatly effected at the back of the box on the plug being pulled out in front after the penny has been put in the slot, and then pushed slowly back again. The envelope prevents the single stamp from being dropped and lost or blown away by the wind. The book itself may be used as material for a hasty letter, the envelope being sealed down, addressed and put into the very pillar-box from which it was obtained. 'Standard' April 30th 1891.

Then again from **The Philatelic Bulletin Oct 1970:-**

These machines were fixed to posting boxes and were loaded with a memorandum stamp book which was approximately 3½ in. x 2¼ in. with a red linen cover. The back cover had an oblique slit into which was inserted a single 1d lilac Queen Victoria stamp which was 'security endorsed' with the initials SDS through the face of the stamp. Inside the covers were 64 pages, some of which bore full-page advertisements. Prospective advertising clients were invited to submit copy on an official Order Form at a full page rate of 5s.6d. per 1,000 with a minimum of 25,000, which was the print order for each series. Payment was due on

the client's approval of the proofed advertisement. Other pages were dated memoranda, for notes, or for use as writing paper for a letter. There were several pages devoted to general information including postage rates, and a calendar for 1891.

The memoranda book and stamp was enclosed in an envelope, gummed, ready for addressing and posting. The fact that all this was obtainable by putting one penny in the machine brought the following comment from the Leeds Daily News of 4 May 1891: ' . . .the fact is that he who puts a penny in the slot will get a better bargain than he who pays for it over the counter!'

Post Office records holds a detailed document showing that some 161,492 books were sold between 2 May and 6 August 1891 - an average of 3,103 books each day. These figures must have been very satisfactory, for in August Maysmor Williams further requested the PMG "for a GENERAL CONCESSION to operate throughout the Country, as he could then form a large Company, for which we have promise of capital. . . ". This request was granted, but as we shall read, was later revoked.

Unfortunately, it appears that later the machines began to give trouble and numerous complaints from the public to the PMG gave rise to an enquiry which confirmed the facts - which in turn 'brought discredit on the GPO . . .'with the result that the PMG wrote to the- Chairman of the SDS, dated 26th March 1892, calling his attention to the fact that ' . . . only two machines were operating, others had the slot blocked and the remainder removed for servicing

It would appear that the culminating incident that put an end to the initial venture was the experience of Mr Maddock, the Controller

of London Postal Services at the time. He graphically portrayed, in a letter to the Postmaster General, his encounter with a machine situated by Victoria Station

". . .I placed the penny in the machine but it got stuck half-way and refused to move in either direction . . . I spent some time, rather furtively, as I did not wish to attract attention, to dislodge the coin, but eventually gave up. After moving some distance away, I happened to look back and observed a man with a pair of tweezers, who "went for my penny"! Evidently, he had been lying in wait and makes a good living from this exercise." Constant complaints made it apparent that '. . machines were being tampered with for dishonest purposes - this in turn brought discredit on the GPO' and in consequence a letter was forwarded on the 27th May 1892 to the Company, terminating the concession. The S.D.S. went into voluntary liquidation.

On one page of the booklet it did state '. . .these books and machines are the property of the Stamp Distribution Syndicate to whom, and NOT to the Post Office, communications or complaints must be made. In emergency, a letter can be written in this Book, and being supplied with Stamp and Envelope, can be posted immediately'. It would appear the general public made their complaints to the PMG rather than the SDS - it always pays to go to the top!!

In the next Bulletin I will continue the story of these first booklet stamps with perfin, relating how **The Stamp Distribution (Parent) Company Limited** took over the concession from The Stamp Distribution Syndicate. This company did last a little longer, but not much.